



# U.S. Forest Service

## Sage-Grouse Bulletin #5

June 7, 2018

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**Summary:** Sage-Grouse Bulletin #5 provides an update on the development of plan amendments in advance of a June 21, 2018 NOI. It also includes information on planning timelines and the decision framework.

### **Potential Plan Amendments – Development of Proposed Action**

On May 22 and 23, 2018 the Forest Service's core Interdisciplinary Team and technical specialists met to develop proposed changes to Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) plan amendments in response to comments received as a result of the 2017 Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (NOI), internal scoping, and through coordination with the Sage Grouse Task Force. The purpose of proposed changes are to improve the clarity, efficiency, and implementation of greater sage-grouse plans, including better alignment with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and state plans, in order to benefit greater sage-grouse conservation on the landscape scale.

There are several categories of proposed changes, which vary by state, and include:

- Streamlining plans in accordance with BLM plans and Forest Service (FS) policy
- Eliminating subset of priority habitat management areas (PHMA) known as sagebrush focal areas
- Editing to correct minor clerical errors, for clarity, and to reduce redundancy
- Creating clarifying stipulations for when habitat disturbing activities are allowed
- Clarifying the current process of making the exceptions for minerals development
- Modifying mapped habitat management areas, and clarifying their purpose and use
- Modifying livestock management guidelines by replacing specific grass-height requirements with standardized use of the habitat assessment framework
- Stressing treatment of invasive plants in PHMAs
- Modifying the adaptive management framework to align the FS framework with BLM and state-based adaptive management systems
- Focusing protections for greater sage-grouse in order to better incentivize habitat disturbance to areas outside of PHMAs
- Modifying the compensatory mitigation framework, including the use of no net loss or net conservation gain elements, in order to promote landscape-scale effectiveness by aligning the FS framework with BLM and state-based compensatory mitigation systems

**Cooperating agency meetings.** Preliminary meetings are ongoing in several states to provide an opportunity to discuss specific proposed actions and to make adjustments prior to the release of the NOI. There will be additional opportunities to provide input on proposed plan changes for cooperating agencies, the public, and other partners during the NOI and draft EIS comment periods.

### **Plan Amendments –NEPA Timelines**

The Forest Service plans to complete one multi-region EIS. At this time, it is likely that the Records of Decision will occur on a state by state basis. The timeline to complete the proposed GRSG plan amendments includes the publication of a NOI on or about June 21 (30 day comment period), a draft EIS for public comment in late August (90 day comment period), a final EIS and draft RODs in January, 2019 (60 day objection period), and then signing of the RODs approving the plan amendments as early as the end of March 2019 to mid-June 2019 at the latest, depending on the complexity of objections received.